

Honoring God



## A Prayer for Justice

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**Study Scripture: Habakkuk 1: 1 -4, 12-14**

**Background Scripture: Habakkuk 1, Genesis 15:6**

Lesson 1

March 7, 2020

*Key Verse.*

*Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?*

Habakkuk 1:13

### **INTRODUCTION**

There is much in the world that has puzzled mankind regardless of their religion, education, culture, history, race and the like. Despite quantum leaps in science, material and social, technology and the humanities, the race continues to struggle for solutions and answers to social ills that have bedeviled human society for the longest time.

Take justice for one; even in the most advanced and enlightened societies, this most basic societal need is often circumvented, subverted and uneven, particularly for those at the lower end of the economic ladder. People cannot seem to recognize and learn about the dangers of not following the ways of Justice.

Only the people of God truly understand and have the right perspective on these matters since they know that only God is just. Even so, they sometimes even today struggle with trying to harmonize the existence of the sovereign, just, omnipotent and omniscient Lord God Almighty with the injustice and other ills prevalent in their own societies. Even though we know that these evils are the result of the curse brought about by humanity's sin, sometimes it can even cause us to question God and His purpose. Sometimes our faith can be shaken to its very core.

The prophet, Habakkuk wrestled with questions about injustice in his subsequent dialogue with God on injustice in his day, and this leads us to further revelation about God's sovereignty and justice, and provides a reassuring respite for Christians, as we contemplate societal evils in our day. The prophet asked some of the most penetrating questions in all literature and the answer is basic to a proper view of God and His relation to history.

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It is to be careful noted however that our Study deals with the problem of history. Remember therefore that the Bible deals with the problem of history as it concerns individual salvation, national salvation, and universal salvation. It therefore starts with the creation of the heavens and earth and only subsequently with the creation of man. The problem of life therefore relates ultimately to the question of universal history.

Whether we like to think of it this way or not this Study in the book of Habakkuk really begins to talk on the enigma of the history of the world and the history controlled by God. We are therefore looking at an enigma, a mysterious, puzzling, or difficult to understand matter. By its very nature it is about something hard to understand or explain, since with our limited understanding of the universe and of man we are looking at something that is really basically inexplicable.

This Study takes us on the fringes of the doctrine of the Providence or Government of God and this is a matter that the righteous Job did not want to tackle after God began to speak to him.

So we are told over and over again that there is such a thing as faith and without faith it is impossible to please God, and impossible for us to survive. Faith then and trust in God then is the victory that overcomes the world.

We are unquestionably looking at the very difficult matter of the apparent silence of God and this is one of the most difficult things that the believer has to contend with. But at the same time the believer is told that he or she must pray constantly even though it seems that God is not hearing. We know that God hears and sees everything.

We are reminded by the prophets that there has to be constant prayer for justice for we are living in a world in which Satan and his followers have significant amounts of influence and control. Since Satan is the master of lies, and since he is against God and God's truth and righteousness, one can expect that man is going to be uncomfortable with inaction and will live under the delusion that one has to do something or other pretty immediately about every matter that we face. Time for us is therefore of the essence without any thought about the complexity of the world, of history, and events that are unfolding.

So as we begin this Study we must remember that the real origin of the famous statement from Habakkuk that *the just shall live by faith*, is really to be found in Genesis 15:6. Moses has written about the experience of Abraham and his dealings with God and we are told that Abraham believed in the Lord and it was reckoned to him for righteousness, so *the just shall live by faith*.

We definitely know from the prophets exactly what God said. The principles of God were listed in the 10 Commandments or the 10 words and into many testimonies recorded. We therefore have to be very careful when dealing with God for He does not think like us, and He does not manage the world in the way that we think He should manage it.

But Scripture does give us clues about the ultimate solutions to the problems of reality. Nevertheless we know that there are many times when God's word is not clear and we do not understand God's will for us even though we know the principles that God has spelled out for our life and behaviour.

There are times therefore when we have to listen to the advice of Moses to the people of Israel, *Stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord*.

And of course the psalmist wrote, My soul waits for the Lord, more than they who watch for the morning. And,

**Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.**

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Difficult matters indeed for we are all tested and tried when we go through many situations in life and therefore have to make constant prayers for justice.

But note that this Book provides the solution to the problem of how God deals with His elect chosen people and also His dealings with the non-elect. Clearly there is a relationship that exists between God and the nation of Israel and the nations around them and His relationship with the church, and we can see from this that God gives us the solution to the problem of individual salvation, namely, *the just shall live by faith*.

We get a great amount of help to the solution of the problems of history for we learn that God really is in control of the affairs of our lives. We must not forget that we are a part of the problem of history, and we thus have to look carefully at the divine solution to this problem.

Little is known of Habakkuk the 'man'. What we know with any certainty is that he was a prophet, he is named as a prophet at the beginning of the book, who lived during the pre-exilic period of Israel's history. King Jehoiakim ruled Judah from 609-598 B.C., so it was apparently during his reign that Habakkuk prophesied (2 Kings 23: 36-24:7; 2 Chronicles 36:5-8). The background for the time when Habakkuk prophesied is the decline of the Judean kingdom that began with the death of King Josiah in 609 B.C.

Habakkuk is another of the 12 books at the end of our Old Testament, generally called the Minor prophets. Note the word "Minor" has nothing to do with their degree of importance. The term highlights the length of these twelve books; all are much shorter than the majority of books described as *major* (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel). Lamentations inclusion in the major writings reflects the fact that the book was written by the major prophet Jeremiah.

The book contains a statement that is fundamental to Christian doctrine and quoted often in the New Testament *The just shall live by faith* or by faithfulness according to some translations. It is quoted in discussions of critically important doctrines in Acts 13: 41, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3: 11, and Hebrews 10: 38.

The content of the book, which includes wisdom literature and a psalm of praise, indicates that Habakkuk was a poet as well as a prophet. The last verse of the book gives a musical notation similar to some psalms and some students concluded from this that he was a musician and possibly a Levite.

Structurally, the first part of the book contains a dialog between Habakkuk and God that alternates between lament and Oracle (1:2- 2:5)

The second part is a taunt or mocking song that the prophet put into the mouth of the nations that had suffered under Babylon's oppression. It consists of five "woes" (2: 6-20).

The third part is a psalm, complete with musical directions (ch.3).

Habakkuk mentions no Kings of either Israel or Judah in his book and this makes the book challenging to date. A key to placing this prophet historically is found in Habakkuk 1:6. There we read of God's promise to raise up the Chaldeans from Babylon (Ezra 5:12; Isaiah 13:19) to inflict judgment on the wayward nation of Judah (the Southern Kingdom). Since the northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C., Habakkuk's complaints and God's response must concern the southern kingdom of Judah.

The prophet lived in troubled times. The reforms of the good King Josiah were now reversed. Idolatry, corruption, violence and injustice against the poor pervaded the land as Judah plunged toward its inevitable doom. Habakkuk and the righteous remnant in the land looked expectantly for God's kind of discipline, which the prophet learned in our Study Text was going to come in a most unexpected and

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terrifying fashion. God had used the Assyrians as His instrument of discipline against the covenant people of the northern kingdom and now He was poised to use the Chaldeans to confront Judah.

The feared Assyrians and the Babylonians who by now were the dominant military power brought immense terror and fear to that part of the world. Their cruelty was legendary as they ruthlessly killed, tortured and destroyed those that stood up to them.

As far as Habakkuk was concerned, it was one thing for the just and holy God to ignore His call for discipline on rebellious Judah but it was quite something else to employ a people more wicked than Judah as the means to discipline the errant nation.

This was an incredible assumption on the part of the prophet which seem to limit the actions of God when there is complete disobedience and a turning away from God. In this the prophet and us have much to learn. God's ways are always just and though we will not always understand it, our place is to trust the character of God. Note that this is not the first time in Israelite history that God used His enemies to discipline His people.

The troubling question for Habakkuk was how could God use a more wicked nation than Judah to punish His chosen people (1; to- 2:11)? The Lord will explain that He would eventually punish the Babylonians for their wickedness (2:2-20). God will not show partiality to His chosen people and He will not show partiality to the pagan instruments.

The final chapter is a hymn of praise extolling Yahweh for His wise ways. The purpose of the then praise, was to vindicate the justice of God, so God's people would have hope and encouragement.

In the interim, while history is still awaiting its conclusion, the righteous ones are to live by faith. The faith prescribed or 'faithfulness' is still called for as a basic response to the unanswered questions in today's world. Habakkuk will demonstrate this faith as we note his transition from doubt and questions to humility and faith! The New Testament sets out this path for believers!

### **THE TEXT**

#### **(Habakkuk 1:1-4)**

These verses introduce Habakkuk and his complaint to the Lord. In his rather pleading exchange with the Lord, Habakkuk's manner of speaking is reminiscent of Job's words when he expressed his own frustration with the Lord. Yet the reasons for these men's questions toward God are grounded in different circumstances. Job's anguish was rooted in the tragedy of his personal suffering (Job 1:2). Habakkuk's concern, however, was much broader in scope.

The prophet Amos had cried out against what was happening in the age of incredible affluence and exploitation of the poor, but now Habakkuk was crying out in the age of violence and injustice on the part of the professing people of God.

Verse 1. **The burden...** translates a Hebrew word that can refer to loads carried by animals (2 Kings 5:17; 8:9) or people (Numbers 11:11, 17). The word is used frequently to introduce prophetic messages that are threatening or ominous in nature (Isaiah 13:1; Nahum 1:1; Zechariah 9:1; Malachi 1:1). Such messages may be seen as burdensome—weighing heavily on the prophets' mind. He will speak them in order to relieve himself of the burden that he feels.

... **the prophet...** This may mean that Habakkuk was a professional prophet and may have been on the Temple staff. These Temple prophets led the people in worshipping God (1 Chronicles 25:1). One of the functions of Temple prophets was to give responses to worshipers who came seeking divine guidance. When the problem was stated, that prophet inquired of God and obtained an answer for the petitioner.

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...*see*... The Hebrew word behind the translation 'see' is frequently used to describe the prophetic experience (Isaiah 1:1; Amos 1:1). The word can indicate that visions are seen or simply that a message is received from the Lord. It indicates that the prophet is a man of unique spiritual vision or insight; he sees with a vision that is empowered by the direction of the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1: 20, 21).

Verse 2. ***O Lord, how long.*** The prophet wastes no time in getting to the heart of his burden. This is a man who is deeply troubled and believes that the Lord has ignored his concerns (Jeremiah 14:9). The phrase ***how long shall I cry*** indicates that Habakkuk had likely voiced his concerns to the Lord repeatedly (Psalm 6:3; 13:1,2). The prophet fears that the only explanation for God's apparent lack of concern is that He is choosing not to hear Habakkuk (Psalm 22:1,2; Exodus 16:28; Numbers 14:11).

Some people think that men of faith never question God. They just sit and wait faithfully and patiently. But one thing we can learn from Habakkuk is that this is a misconception. Those who trust in God can and do ask questions of Him.

... ***thou wilt not hear***... God hears all prayers because He is omniscient, but Habakkuk meant that God had not given evidence of hearing by responding to his prayer.

Note that the prophet is animated and his argument is, ***how long?*** He knows that God will act for God is totally separated from evil.

***Even cry out onto thee.*** Habakkuk rightly assumes that the just and righteous God cares deeply when violence goes unchecked (Genesis 6:11-13). Furthermore, the Lord is known as a God who will save His people when they call on Him (2 Chronicles 20:9; Psalm 107:13, 19).

Note, ***violence*** (Heb.*hamas*) occurs six times in Habakkuk (1:2,3,9; 2:8,17), an unusually large number of times for such a short book.

The Hebrew word means more than just physical brutality. It refers to flagrant violation of moral law by which someone injures his fellow man (Genesis 6:11). By piling up synonyms for injustice, Habakkuk stressed the severity of the oppression. One writer notes:

**“This is not an instance of the earthen vessel finding fault with the potter who made it—an attitude rebuked by Isaiah and Paul (Isaiah 29:16)**

**It is to the one who answers back in unbelief that Paul says, ‘Who indeed are you... to argue with God?’ (Romans 9:20).**

**But there are others who answer back in faith; their words, when they do so, are the expressions of their loyalty to God”.**

Verse 3.... *iniquity... grievance?* Here we are introduced to six words Habakkuk uses to describe the chaos species everywhere he turns. Each couplet of words have overlapping meanings and all together give a sense of intensity. There is a sense of chaos and this stands in opposition to the order that God created in the world (Genesis 1:2; John 1:1-5; Acts 17:24-28).

Habakkuk, like Job before him, asks questions of the Lord that presuppose God's character (Job 3:11, 12, 20, 23; compare Habakkuk 1:13). Habakkuk's questions are not primarily about why he sees iniquity and reasons to be grieved. The answer to that question is quite simple; people are sinful, and so Habakkuk sees sin around him. The subtext of this question, rather, is why the Lord has not put an end to these things.

Thus the questions are based on the assumption that God is holy and good. Given this fact, it makes no sense to Habakkuk that God is not acting to right the horrible wrongs that the prophet witnesses.

***For spoiling and violence... strife and contention.*** spoiling might be associated with warfare and the taking of plunder from others (Isaiah 16:4; Hosea 10: 14; Amos 5:9) and with violence, it emphasizes

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the horrible results often associated with war and violence (Jeremiah 6: 7; 20:8; Ezekiel 45:9; Habakkuk 2:17).

**Strife and contention** add explicitly chaotic overtones to Habakkuk's description (Jeremiah 15: 10). Taken together, Habakkuk longs for the order with which the Creator has graced the world.

Verse 4. **The law is slacked...** in an environment such as Habakkuk describes, there is clearly no respect whatsoever for authority or law. (Isaiah 1: 23 ; 29 : 21 ; Ezekiel 9: 9). The Hebrew word translated slacked elsewhere refers to being made feeble (Psalm 38:8), and that is the sense here. The law is inactive and essentially lifeless. The law of Moses means nothing. The Torah the law for the whole of life and the requirement for justice, the law of social relations and legal decisions is ignored.

The wicked surround the righteous and prevent righteousness from existing in the nation.

By pointing this out, Habakkuk hopes to see God move to action (Psalm 119:126). The law is toothless, impotent.

**And judgment doth never go forth...** in parallel to the weakened law, Judgement is also powerless. The word judgment is often paired with the word justice as similar concepts, and that is the sense here (Jeremiah 22: 15; 23: 5; Ezekiel 45: 9). The situation is similar to the time of Amos, who expressed God's desire that judgment and righteousness flow like a mighty stream (Amos 5:24). Those qualities are as absent in Habakkuk's surroundings as they were in Amos's.

Before we go further we must understand that the same kind of thing today happens within our society because we have evil in high places which has made it impossible for the truth of God to prevail. It is not only in Nazi Germany that evil reigned. We have various types of evil activities, litigation, oppression in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the kind of life that is supposedly not in any way to characterize a professing Christian world. It has often been pointed out that we have a situation in our countries that in some ways parallel the situation Habakkuk saw. The only difference is that our nation is not a nation in covenant with God. But they were a covenanted and elected people and yet we see the rise of wickedness that existed then just like the wickedness that exists today. We are now in days very similar to the days of Amos and Habakkuk. So we too can ask, **How long?**

**For the wicked doth compass about the righteous.** It is not hard to imagine that in the conditions described, the wicked appear to be in complete control. They hem in the righteous—surrounding them to suppress any effort the righteous put forth to express their concerns (Psalm 17:9; 22: 16). They circumvent the righteous and frustrate their efforts to effect justice.

So we see today that though there is a law on whistleblowing or reporting illegal activity, to protect whistleblowers who see evil and injustice and corruption in our system of government, the whistleblowers are persecuted rather than encouraged and they are attacked on the basis that they are disloyal to the country. That is incredible. And we even hear professing Christians who will argue loudly that whistleblowers who reveal the truth of illegal activity going on should be put in jail, the key tossed away, with the idea that maybe they should be killed. There is little desire to know the truth of what is really going on.

Again the situation is reminiscent of how Amos described his environment: **The prudent shall Keep silence in that time: for it is an evil time.** (Amos 5:13). Now it is to be noted that that expression in Hebrew does not say that the righteous must keep silent in the face of evil. The verse does not give any support to cowardice. If evil is to be restrained people must act to protect the nation, and not think that they should leave the work of others. David also pondered the permanence of wickedness (Psalm 11:1-3; see Job 21:7-13). The reader might be reminded of the sad moral climate that prevailed during the

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time of the judges in Israel when everyone did whatever they thought best, and what they thought best was generally always evil.

***Therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.*** Not surprisingly, wrong judgment becomes the norm under such conditions. This is a perversion of what God intended for His covenant people to maintain in their court system. (Deuteronomy 16:18-20; Isaiah 5:20).

Verses 5 to 11. God intends to do things that Habakkuk could not believe even if the Lord revealed His plans to the prophet. The Lord tells the troubled prophet that He will raise up the violent Chaldeans to administer disciplinary measures to His wayward people. Thus God will respond to the violence in Judah by bringing the violence of the Chaldeans against the nation.

The prophet is jarred by the news of God's plans. How could God use a "more" sinful people to punish His people. A Babylonian invasion would likely spell the end of Judah. The invaders were a murderous horde described with vivid imagery and they spread murder, mayhem, violence and cruelty.

In this divine activity the prophet would be astonished and wonder. There would be no sense running to Egypt for help just as it is foolish for us to run away from God to others when we face the problems of life.

We know a lot from history about the activities of the Chaldeans and their description as a fierce and impetuous people; bitter and hasty people was quite accurate. They were fierce. One writer describes what they did to others:

**"The Chaldeans, the Babylonians, when they came had the habit of just fanning out over all of the territory and taking everything which was in their way. They very seldom fought pitched battles, occasionally they did, but generally speaking they did not. He says they are dreaded and feared. Their justice and authority originate with themselves. In other words, they are autonomous people, they have no concern whatsoever about a God. Their authority originates within themselves, they are their own gods. *"Their horses are swifter than leopards and keener wolves in the evenings"*.**

**The evening wolves, their horsemen come galloping, their horsemen come from afar, they fly like an eagle swooping down to devour. All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand. They mock at Kings and rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress and heap up rubble to capture it. It was a well-known feature of their work of plundering that when they came to a high walled city they didn't try to break down the walls, they just built giant mounds of ground so all they had to do was to walk up the ground and into the city.' Then they will sweep through like the wind and passed on but they will be held guilty'.**

**He states "They whose strength is their god'. He speaks about Nebuchadnezzar because Nebuchadnezzar is the one who came and ultimately destroyed the city. So that "he whose might is his god, is referred to by him".**

The Chaldeans were pretty brutal and their leader Nebuchadnezzar was most ruthless and disrespectful of other nations. We see in the book of Daniel what he thought and how he was prepared to treat his own soothsayers who would not tell him what he wanted to know about his dreams

Verse 12. ***Art though not from everlasting....*** Habakkuk speaks again, reacting to the Lord's planned discipline of His people. The prophet wonders what he knows to be true of the Lord but he states what he knows was true of God.

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***O Lord my God..*** the prophet uses the name Yahweh and Elohim emphasizing the covenant keeping, self-existent attributes of God and God's omnipotence. God is in covenant with Judah and nothing can happen outside of His permissive or decretive will.

***Mine Holy One...*** is unique in the Old Testament, occurring only here. Similar phrases emphasize God's relationship with all Israel, not with one individual (Isaiah 31:1; 37: 23). Habakkuk appears to be alone in referring to the Lord as his personal holy God. This confidence in his relationship with God probably explains Habakkuk's frank's speech.

God's eternal nature seems to be the basis of Habakkuk's assertion that God's people shall not die. Because God is everlasting and has made everlasting promises, the prophet feels confident that God cannot really intend to destroy His people utterly (Psalm 118:17) as might be the result of an Assyrian invasion. Yet the situation around Habakkuk suggests that this confidence might be misplaced (Isaiah 10: 5-7).

***O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment:*** Habakkuk acknowledges the decision of the Lord in order to set out his question following. ***Them*** refers to Babylon. The facts as Habakkuk sees them are that the people are marked for judgment and correction, even though they would be the instruments to bring correction to Judah.

***... mighty...*** is translated "rock", implying firmness, security, and changelessness (Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 Samuel 2:2). God's history of interactions with His people has proven that He really is faithful and consistent. His decision to correct them is consistent with covenant stipulations.

One should note that Habakkuk has no reservations whatsoever about God's people deserving to be punished for their many transgressions. The way they have discarded the Lord's covenant and trampled on His law as already described is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated. (Habakkuk 1:2-4). But using the wicked Chaldeans to carry out the punishment certainly does not seem a fair or just punishment to Habakkuk.

Verse 13. ***Thou art of purer eyes than...*** Habakkuk's words reflect once again his understanding of the holy, righteous character of God. God's purity in regard to sin does not allow Him to behold evil, meaning not that God does not see but that He does not see without action (Psalm 18:26; Lamentations 3: 34 -36). How can the Lord who cannot tolerate the presence of any kind of iniquity allow the obviously despicable Chadians to overpower the people of Judah? (Contrast Psalm 25:1-3) .

When the Lord revealed that He was going to allow the ruthless Chadians to execute judgment on His people, Habakkuk was nonplussed! How could the righteous God turn a blind eye to the sins of a nation that was more wicked than faithless Judah? Yet God had already taken that fact into account (Habakkuk 2:4-17).

**God has no blind eye. Any seeming defect in how He should act is our own blindness, not His.**

***Wherefore lookest thou...?*** Because Yahweh was the Holy One, Habakkuk knew that He was too pure to look approvingly at evil nor could He favour wickedness. This was a basic tenet of Israel's faith (Psalm 5:4; 34: 16, 21).

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But this raised another, more serious problem in the prophet's mind. Why did the Lord then seemingly look approvingly on the treachery of the Babylonians? Why did He not reprove them and restrain them when the Babylonians slew people who were more righteous than they?

Habakkuk is incredulous as he considers the people whom God has chosen to chastise Judah. The Chaldeans are described with exceptionally derogatory language by the Lord Himself (Habakkuk 1: 6-11). How can they be the ones whom God will use as the rod of discipline? To Habakkuk, to do so seem to compromise qualities that identify the Lord.

True, the people of Judah deserved the Lord's judgment, but so do the Chaldeans. Habakkuk; knowing his own people are evil as he does, he contends that Judah is more righteous than the Chaldeans. It seems however that the prophet is prepared to argue that sin is not quite "sin" even though he has just said that God is perfectly holy and that His eyes were too pure to look on evil. He seems to have forgotten that when it comes to evil Judah might be in exactly the same category as the Chaldeans and the only thing that saved them, (remember that only the remnant would be saved), was because of the covenant promises to Abram, Isaac, and Jacob.

It is on the same type of reasoning that a believer might say that because they are believers their children even though they continued to evil are better in some way than a person that has not grown up in a Christian home. Therefore their children should be saved or at the minimum not be judged by the rules of God because of their parents faith.

We note however that the prophet was not immune from the ultra-nationalistic interpretations of salvation that had infected the nation and made it difficult for them not to see that they were blind to the things of God.

We too in the modern church will very likely suffer from the same disease; it appears that we have been thinking that because we sing the songs of Zion and go to church regularly God will overlook whatever it is we choose to do even that we are guilty of injustice, murder, racial hatred, theft, greed, and all kind of other sins including the sexual ones that we so readily condemn.

But we know that in the eyes of God after all is said and done we are simply unprofitable servants.

The prophet has not hesitated to voice his dismay over the Lord's reaction toward Judah's wickedness and his proposed course of action using Babylon without considering their wickedness. Yet the Lord seems to hold His tongue and remain unmoved by what the prophet sees as obvious injustice (compared Job 21: 7-13).

Habakkuk and Jonah are an interesting prophet pair. Habakkuk criticized God for using a pagan nation who punishes people, while Jonah questioned God for forgiving a pagan nation on the verge of facing His judgment that would wipe them out. Jonah's objection were the product of not seeing that all men are sinners, but it was very important to God that the Assyrian people in Nineveh despite their abominable track record of cruelty and injustice, accept the message of the Prophet Jonah, repent of their sins, and thus escape the Lord's wrath. Jonah presented the compassion of the Lord toward the Assyrians, insisting that God ought to punish them instead of showing them mercy. (Jonah 4:1,2)

He had forgotten the warning of the psalmist that said that it was because of God's mercy and compassion that Jacob themselves was not consumed.

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So we ask ourself, Are we different though we have seen all of the behaviour and these things in Scripture?

Verse 14. *And makest men....* when God created the first man and woman, He gave them dominion over all other created beings including the fish and all creeping things (Genesis 1: 26). Habakkuk, in his bewilderment over God's dealing with His people, wonders whether the Lord is treating human beings as no more than fishes and other creatures that are allowed to be captured and killed at random. Apparently there is no ruler to hold the Chaldeans accountable, or at least it appears that way to Habakkuk.

In the remaining verses of chapter 1, Habakkuk continues his marine metaphor by comparing the wicked Chaldeans to a fisherman who gathers fish in fishing nets and takes great pleasure in doing so. The Chaldeans are portrayed as worshipping their nets, that is, they are congratulating themselves and their ability to overpower whomever they please. They are as suited to do violence as the fisherman is to fishing.

Fish benefit from being a part of a school. Together they are able to detect nearby predatory animals, find food, or locate potential mates. But as every fisherman knows, schools of fish are easy targets for human predators. Productive fishing happens in places where fish are found in a group. Fishermen can lure and hook one after another! Those fishing with the Nets can lower them into a school, capturing dozens of fish at once. Lacking an alpha leader, fish swim around without leadership, almost begging to be caught!

Habakkuk uses such imagery to compare Babylon to a fisherman and describe the nations they conquered as helpless fish. Just like fish that have no ruler are easily hooked or captured in a net weak nations are easy prey for the strong and ruthless.

So too a “school” of people suffer without the leadership of a knowledgeable teacher. How does your community stay connected to our great teacher and leader Jesus?

## CONCLUSION

One important first lesson is that when you have a problem that does not seem to have any solution take your problems, all of them, to the Lord. Habakkuk does not cry against God, he cries **out** to God and that is what you should do.

You should also learn from our Study that the ways of God are often mysterious. He does not always act immediately and His inactions puzzles but when He answers, they come in an unexpected way and the instruments that He uses are generally very unusual. The longer you live the more you will see that.

But it is certain that when people who do not know God are used by God, these people often don't understand what is happening even when they are being used by God. They think that it is their strength or skill that has brought them success. So Nebuchadnezzar later says, “Is not this great Babylon that I have built?”

God's ways therefore are often misunderstood by those that are not religious, but God's ways are also misunderstood by the religious. So when God spoke to the prophet of Israel He said, Now, observe, be

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astonished and wonder. You would not understand what is happening even if I told you so. We know therefore that spiritual people and even the prophets have to go to God and say, How long?

Part of the reason for this is that spiritual people really don't pay attention, pay enough attention to the word of God and so they do not understand God sufficiently. We all suffer from this. When the Flood came the people misunderstood the message from God. In the Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction the people did not understand what was happening and so they died.

But we must strive to understand the Justice of God. We have to pray for the Justice of God to be unfolded in such a way that we can understand Him better.

But in doing so we must understand that the events of the world are under His control. God is doing something that is exciting and wondrous and so we are instructed to look among the nation and observe and be astonished. History follows a divine plan and a divine timetable and God works all things according to the counsel of His own will.

So we want you to understand and we want to remember that when things happen in human history they are not accidents at all. These unpleasant things which have been happening because of sin are not accidents. World events are under the control of the Lord and hence one writer reports this saying:

### **Make your plans with a pencil so that God can rub them out.**

Habakkuk's nation Judah was in a spiritual freefall, ripe for the judgment of the Almighty God. God's method for providing that judgment was not at all that wonderful in Habakkuk's eyes. The prophet did not view it as an acceptable solution to the problem. Habakkuk struggled to reconcile his understanding of God with the uncertain world around him.

Habakkuk's concern has been voiced repeatedly through the years. For example Asaph, the author of Psalms 73, was deeply troubled over what he saw as God's unfair treatment of the wicked. They appear to prosper and live carefree lives while completely oblivious to God and His ways. Psalm 10 begins by expressing similar disappointment in God's seemingly uncaring attitude about injustices in the world. The wicked do just as they please and benefit from their evil while their victims suffer. Doesn't God see? And if He does, doesn't He care?

This matter up justice, doing justly is something that comes from the heart of God. It forms a red line that professing believers should not cross. But they do cross it. They do that over and over again. When the people of the Northern Kingdom called Israel, and the people of the Southern Kingdom called Judah crossed that line and stayed across the line they never ever did Justice. They never prayed for Justice. They never cared about the interest of others, especially those that were vulnerable and helpless. But then came the consequences.

So we should ask ourselves the question as to whether or not we have also crossed the line and rejected the ways of God's justice and therefore do not bother to pray for justice.

This is a struggle with which nearly all of us can readily identify. When we find ourselves questioning God or His purpose for the circumstances we are confronting, we are in good company. But note Habakkuk never suggested that God was unrighteous. God was too holy for that.

## Jesus Teaches about True Worship

Prophets like Habakkuk and righteous people like those in Scripture were some of the most outspoken in their questions and accusations directed toward the one who called them to His service. (Compare Numbers 11: 10-15; 1 Kings 19:4; Psalm 13:1-4; Jeremiah 20: 7, 8; Matthew 11:1-3).

God is not caught off guard with such language. Indeed, sometimes He even chooses to engage our questions, though the answers may not be what we want to hear. Habakkuk questioned God and the answers he received were answers he did not want to hear. We too know that our knowledge of the Lord can lead us to conclusions that seem correct but in the end require correction from God. (Job 38:1-40:2).

In all of life's circumstances, but especially in times of discipline, let us rest in the knowledge that God does not change (James 1: 17). He is working in our world to accomplish His purposes for us and through us.

It is good to remember that God has told us that His ways are not our ways, and that His ways are beyond our finding out.

So if you're convinced that God's ways are better than your ways, that His ways are wiser than your ways, and that even though you do not understand what God is doing what you really need is to trust in Him that would be very good. These situations are where our faith is tested; when we are trusting the word of God even though we cannot understand it. This faith or faithfulness is the victory that overcomes the world and Satan.